United Nations S/PV.8373

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8373rd meeting

Wednesday, 17 October 2018, 9:30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Llorentty Soliz/Mrs. Cordova Soria	(Bolivia (Plurinational State of))
Members:	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Sipaco Ribala
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Cohen

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

18-32500 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 9.30 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Egypt, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. De Mistura.

Mr. De Mistura: When I briefed the Security Council last month (see S/PV.8345), I said that we were approaching a moment of truth in the effort to convene a United Nations-facilitated, Syrian-led and Syrian-owned constitutional committee, which, at the moment, is the main outstanding item with regard to the way we should implement resolution 2254 (2015). Everything else is still on the table but that item remains the most important one at the moment. A credible and balanced committee could be the cornerstone of an inclusive political process for Syrians in the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which is the only one we have.

Yesterday, I consulted Secretary-General António Guterres at length and received very clear instructions regarding our accelerated effort to convene a credible and balanced constitutional committee — the only kind that the United Nations — and by that I mean the Secretariat — would be willing to convene and the only one with which it would like to be associated. I will return to those instructions later. But, first, let us be a bit more precise about where we are.

As I told the Council last month, some things are quite clear. The two lists of 50 names each for a constitutional committee submitted by the Government and the opposition, respectively, are not in question, but questions continue to be raised, mainly by the Syrian Government, about the composition of the middle third list of 50 names. Let me recall how we arrived at the middle third list, which is now on the table and which has been revised more than once and updated into a new list.

The final statement of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue, held in Sochi, spoke about the need to include "Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women", with "adequate representation of Syrian ethnic and religious components". The Sochi final statement made clear that it was via the Geneva process and through the facilitation of the Special Envoy that a final selection would be made.

In truth, it went even further than that. The Secretary-General has asked me to remind the Council that, in addition to the terms of the Sochi final statement itself, an explicit United Nations-Russian understanding was reached during the Vienna consultation, which took place just before the United Nations attended the meeting in Sochi. The understanding was that I, as Special Envoy, would be free to draw not only on names emanating from Sochi, but also on other names, including, if necessary, those of Syrians who did not attend the meeting in Sochi, in order to form a balanced and credible list. Let me also recall that, in any case, resolution 2254 (2015) mandates the United Nations to convene parties in the political process and assigned to the Geneva talks the task of setting a schedule and process for drafting a new Constitution.

There should be no doubt that the middle third list was very carefully developed by the United Nations. We received input from and listened to many, including the guarantors and others. Moreover, we also did our own careful homework. We sought out credible and neutral Syrian experts, including people who had played a role in the previous Constitution-making process and could bridge and build upon the two sides and with whom the sides could work constructively. We look for respected civil society representatives, independents and other Syrians of standing — individuals who, as in any other constitutional process, could somehow represent the many Syrians who are not political affiliates but still deserve a stake in their future. Of course, we know that all Syrians, like all of us, have a political opinion or leaning, which is totally natural. But we sought a fair balance among the various political leanings so that no one side could dominate the committee. This is a very key part of what we consider to be the credibility and legitimacy of the list. We ensured the adequate representation of various ethnic, religious and regional

backgrounds, as well as a balance between those living inside Syria and the millions of Syrians, who, for the moment, are living outside their country due to the conflict.

Lastly, with the full support of the Secretary-General and as part of our commitment to giving full effect to resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, we insisted that a minimum of 30 per cent of the constitutional committee should be women. This meant bringing many qualified and expert women of all backgrounds into the middle third, and indeed the proposed middle third is almost half women. That is what has guided United Nations efforts to facilitate the middle third and revise it into a new list, as has already been done. I have also carefully facilitated development as per resolution 2254 (2015) and the final statement of the Sochi National Dialogue Congress. They both stipulate that on a logical basis I should prepare some basic aspects of the process and rules of procedure that could enable the constitutional committee to work.

From the three lists of the Government, the opposition and the middle third, it would be possible to identify a smaller group, numbering 15 from each, to form a drafting body for the constitutional committee. The committee could be mandated to draft constitutional reform for popular approval, as a contribution to the political settlement in Syria, leading to a new political structure and giving effect to the Sochi final statement of 20 January. Within the context of the Geneva process to implement resolution 2254 (2015), such a constitutional reform could aim to embody in the Constitution and constitutional practices of Syria the letter and spirit of the 12 principles developed in Geneva at great length and with a lot of hard work, endorsed in Sochi, and offering the people of Syria a vision of a future that can be shared by all.

The constitutional committee could work in Geneva with an impartial Syrian chairmanship acceptable to all components, supported by United Nations facilitation and with appropriate decision-making arrangements. Of course, these arrangements should all be consistent with respect for Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity. The United Nations facilitation should enable the Syrians themselves to engage with one another and independently and democratically determine their own future with dignity. Clearly, the key parties are the Syrian parties, but equally, the prospect of an effective constitutional committee also rests on strong support from key countries. They will be further engaged by us in the coming weeks.

Let me start with the Government of Syria. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Al-Moualem met with the Secretary-General during the general debate of the General Assembly, a meeting that I also attended. At the meeting, the Foreign Minister voiced strong doubts about the Sochi final statement and its outcome, indicating that the Government had a very different understanding of those matters. He called for a fundamental reassessment of the work that had been done to date on the middle-third list and rules of procedure, as well as on the United Nations facilitation role. For his part, the Secretary-General reiterated the Sochi statement and its outcome, as well as the mandate of the Security Council, and offered to have me explain the work that has been done on it in much more detail. He appealed to the Foreign Minister to ensure that the Government could work in partnership with the United Nations.

For their part, two of the Astana guarantors, Russia and Iran, have also significantly questioned the middle-third list, indicating that it does not meet the Government's requirements, despite the extensive consultations and the Sochi understanding. At the same time, they have indicated that they are continuing to engage with the Government of Syria on the matter and indeed, as we speak, senior Russian officials will be visiting Damascus in the next few days. Turkey, which initially felt that our list could benefit from revision, has recently indicated its own full understanding of the logic and composition of the third list.

For its part, the Syrian High Negotiations Committee, as we call the opposition, confirmed to the Secretary-General during the general debate its readiness to move ahead on the basis of the broad package on the table. The opposition met at the beginning of this week in Riyadh, and most of the nominees for the constitutional committee are right now sitting together in internal consultations in order to prepare for their work. The small-group countries — Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States — have all urged the United Nations to convene a constitutional committee without delay. Similar messages have come during the past few days from a large number of European and Arab Foreign Ministers with whom I met during the general debate.

I would like to inform the Security Council that the Government of Syria has invited me to Damascus next week in a follow-up to the meeting with the Secretary-General during the general debate. I plan to engage with them on the work that has been done on the constitutional committee. If the Council wishes, I will of course be ready to report back to it after my visit on whether those direct consultations have produced the approval of and agreement on a credible and inclusive third list, as we hope.

Before the end of the month I also intend to invite the Astana guarantors for consultation with me in Geneva and to engage with the small-group countries. In my view that would be our final opportunity to put the finishing touches to the preparations for convening a constitutional committee. I would then hope to be in a position to issue invitations to convene the committee, if possible during November. I can offer no guarantee as to whether this is possible, but what I do know after nine months of preparations is that it is important to launch a credible constitutional committee and that whatever transpires, I would like to come back and brief the Council in November on where we stand.

Let me remind us all that if steps are not taken towards achieving a safe, calm and neutral environment, the work of a constitutional committee would not end up being very meaningful. We all know that. But first things first. On the constitutional committee front, despite our best efforts regarding steps towards a safe, calm and neutral environment, we have seen very few concrete outcomes during 2018. I hope we will see more in the upcoming months. For instance, the Working Group on the release of detainees/abductees and handover of the bodies and the identification of missing persons, met again last week in Tehran. We continue to urge it to come up with its first tangible results, as many, many people in Syria are waiting for them.

Let us look now at the big picture for a moment before we go back to the constitutional committee. A catastrophe has so far been averted in Idlib and the Russian-Turkish memorandum of understanding appears to be being implemented. Major strides have been taken in defeating terrorism, and that should continue to be a priority. The territorial base of the Islamic State in Syria and the Levant has largely been erased, although it does remain dangerous. For the moment the de facto map of Syria today is relatively stable, but it must not become a de facto soft partition, nor a theatre for new international confrontations.

There must therefore be a political path forward. President Putin and President Erdoğan have said that the Idlib deal offers a window for the constitutional committee to be established and the political process to go ahead. The European Union, for instance, will host a third Brussels conference in March 2019, and we know that its decisions will depend on a credible political process. The United Nations has done all that it can — and, frankly, more — to find a way to convene a credible and balanced constitutional committee. We are ready to do more, and do it faster, during the upcoming months, taking advantage of the Idlib window of opportunity. However, we are not ready to convene a committee that is not credible and balanced.

In that regard, having consulted the Secretary-General, let me also give the Council a heads-up, if I may. I will myself be moving on, as of the last week of November. I have had the honour to serve for four years and four months as Special Envoy. For some time, I have been discussing with the Secretary-General my desire, for purely personal reasons, to move on. I deeply appreciate his constant support and wise counsel with regard to this matter, but I will definitely not say goodbye or engage in reflections today. A month can be a century in politics. We will continue to have a very intense and, hopefully, fruitful month ahead. I will not lay down my charge until the last hour of the last day of my mandate. In fact, the Secretary-General has instructed me that my last month of service should be used to actively verify whether or not the United Nations is in a position to convene a credible and balanced constitutional committee, and report to the Security Council accordingly. I plan to do so with clarity and frankness and count on the support of the Security Council and all Syrian counterparts to do so.

Let me summarize the bottom line of my message, which has been long.

First, the Idlib memorandum of understanding provides a unique window of opportunity for launching a credible and inclusive constitutional committee. We must take advantage of it. That is, and remains, our aim. Our assessment is that if there is political will, there is no reason for a constitutional committee not to be convened in November — 10 months after the Sochi declaration. Secondly, the main reason for the delay in convening in Geneva the first session of a credible and inclusive constitutional committee involves the difficulties that the Government has in accepting the current third list of participants prepared by the United

Nations in accordance with the Sochi declaration and resolution 2254 (2015). Thirdly, I plan to discuss that pending issue during my forthcoming mission to Damascus and report back to the Secretary-General and the Security Council thereafter on the outcome. Fourthly, since my personal plan, in consultation with the Secretary-General, has always been to end my mission, for purely personal reasons, in the last week of November — four years and four months after it began — my intention, and as per the instructions of the Secretary-General, is to dedicate this crucial last month to actively verify, once and for all, the feasibility of the implementation of a credible and inclusive constitutional committee, as well as the implementation of the Sochi declaration.

I will therefore report in November to the Secretary-General and the Security Council on the status of the implementation of the constitutional committee in order to allow the Secretary-General and the Security Council to draw their own conclusions, so that my own successor can start his or her own mission with a clean slate.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Mr. De Mistura for his comprehensive and detailed briefing.

I would request members of the Security Council and those joining us in the Chamber to remember to turn off their cell phones and please focus on those taking the floor.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council wishing to make statements.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing and his hard work to prepare for political progress in Syria. We have before the Security Council today a very rare thing — a brief window of opportunity to advance a political solution in Syria. We should take it. History will be unforgiving if we fail to do so.

The United States has sought every opportunity to prevent the Al-Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian allies from pursuing a military end to the conflict in Syria. We have long called for a credible, inclusive constitutional committee that will begin the essential work of drafting a new Syrian constitution. That committee will lay the groundwork for free and fair elections in Syria, supervised by the United Nations and open to all eligible Syrians, including those who were forced to flee their country during the present conflict. The United States has worked long and hard for this progress in Syria, as have some others on the Security Council. That said, the United States did not always support Russia's January proposal for such a committee. We had concerns that that initiative would undermine the Geneva process. We had concerns about Russia's good faith. We had doubts about whether Russia intended to support a political transition in Syria and whether the proposed constitutional committee was a way for Russia to assert its influence over Syria rather than to blaze a path to peace, because, frankly, Al-Assad, Russia and Iran have the most to gain from pursuing a military end to the Syrian war. De-escalation zones have been established and ignored by Russia and the Al-Assad regime. Accountability has been resisted. Villages have been levelled. Humanitarian assistance has been denied. Weapons of mass destruction have been used. So yes, we had concerns.

In the eight months since the announcement, the United States has consulted with other Security Council members. We felt that if there were an opportunity to move towards a political solution, we should do everything possible to make it work. Today there is a consensus in the Security Council that a constitutional committee should be convened in Geneva immediately by the United Nations Special Envoy, as he wishes to do. We join in this consensus. Our Syria small-group partners have also rallied behind that idea. Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom support the creation of such a group to map Syria's political future without delay, but it is starting to look as though our concerns may have been warranted. We see the Al-Assad regime using the same delaying tactics that have stalled the political process in Syria for years.

The Special Envoy has worked hard to prepare a diverse and credible list of Syrians to serve on the constitutional committee. The candidates are drawn from all parts of Syrian society. Many of them are experts in the law and the process of drafting a new constitution, and, just last month, Turkey and Russia announced an agreement in principle on lists of possible members of the committee, but now the Al-Assad regime is objecting to those lists. They now want veto power over the United Nations process. They have at the eleventh hour invited the Special Envoy to Damascus next week for new consultations after months of not engaging. We welcome Special Envoy De Mistura's offer to brief the Council on his Damascus trip as soon

as possible, and we hope that such briefing will take place before the end of this month.

The Syrian representative to the United Nations has told the Council that Damascus rejects Russia's own Sochi declaration that launched the constitutional committee. Syria rejected Russia's diplomatic initiative. Let us therefore be clear about what Al-Assad is up to. This is not a last-ditch attempt at diplomacy. This is another obvious attempt to delay the United Nations effort to forge a political consensus and a political solution. There can be only two purposes for these delaying tactics, neither of which speak well of the motives of Al-Assad and his Russian friends. Either they are attempting to create an unbalanced committee that will rubber-stamp the regime's positions, or they are attempting to forestall the vital work of the committee, which is the critical work of establishing self-government for the Syrian people. Let us remember what is at stake if the Syrian regime and the Russian Federation delay the creation of the committee. There will be no progress on the new Syrian constitution, no progress towards free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections, and no progress on a political solution. This moment of calm and opportunity, which has created the time and space for political progress, could well evaporate.

The United States does not share the view that a November launch of the committee is rushed or premature. Quite to the contrary, delay risks disaster. We have the lists of participants. The Security Council has had the road map for a political settlement since it adopted resolution 2254 (2015), in 2015. The Special Envoy has every authority to convene the committee and tells us that he is ready to do so. We believe that he should. Special Envoy De Mistura should set a date for the first meeting of the committee, issue invitations and move ahead with talks, and he should do so without delay. While some in this Chamber are in no hurry to move forward on the political process, there are 6 million refugees who cannot return home without progress on the 2254 process. The constitutional committee is only a very early step towards this. There are 3 million Syrian civilians in Idlib whose fate also hangs in the balance. The Syrian and Russian jets are grounded, for now. The heavy weapons have been removed from Turkey and Russia's demilitarized zone, for now. The ceasefire in Idlib has given us a window of opportunity, but it is a window that could close at any minute.

We remind the Council that resolution 2254 (2015), which was adopted without opposition in this Chamber, explicitly supports a nationwide ceasefire to accompany and reinforce the initial steps towards political transition. The United States has been clear; any military escalation in Idlib or beyond remains unacceptable and would gravely threaten efforts to find a peaceful political solution to this crisis. The Syrian people have been silenced for too long. We have a unique opportunity to forge a political solution to one of the most bloody and destructive wars of our lifetime. This moment of opportunity will not last long, based on all that we have seen in Syria over the past years. I urge my colleagues to resist further delays and take this historic opportunity.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his very informative briefing and exemplary commitment. I also wish to commend the exceptional work of the Special Envoy and reiterate to him France's full and entire support for the crucial month ahead of us.

Each of us is well aware that Syria is at a crossroads. It could either topple to military escalation in Idlib, which would open one of the darkest chapters of the Syrian tragedy, or take the demanding path of true political momentum towards a settlement of the conflict. It is our conviction that today, and perhaps for the first time in seven years, there is a narrow window of opportunity in this respect, and it is our collective responsibility to seize it. Today both the darkest and the most promising scenarios are possibilities; the choice depends largely on us and on the ability of the Council to unite around the option of peace — a step that, despite the tremendous difficulties of which we all are aware, is today within our reach. In that context, the creation of a constitutional committee can and should be the inflection point that we seek — the first stage of a genuine political dynamic. The establishment of that committee as soon as possible is therefore our priority today.

Staffan de Mistura has just presented us with a mixed picture — to put it mildly — of the progress made on the political scene. Ten months after the announcement of the establishment of the constitutional committee during the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi in January, that forum has yet to meet. Let us say it how it is; that stalemate is directly linked to obstruction by the Syrian regime, which ultimately tells us that it does not wish to take

part in the ongoing diplomatic efforts, while its allies are unable or unwilling to convince it to put an end to its intransigence. The lists from the opposition and the regime were sent to the United Nations several months ago, but the systematic obstruction by the regime and its allies on the composition of the third third of the committee has paralysed those efforts. I remind the Council that the Sochi Congress gave a mandate to the Special Envoy for the composition of that committee. It is our collective responsibility to firmly support him in his efforts and to call for an end to any obstruction to the implementation of the road map that we all agreed.

It is therefore imperative that the first meeting of the committee take place as soon as possible and with a clear time frame in order to put an end to these delay tactics. We are determined to support the Special Envoy in carrying out his work, and we need a specific date. I wish to inform Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura that, in keeping with the role accorded the United Nations in this process, he has all the room for manoeuvre that may be necessary to move forward. That is the thrust of the support that the ministers of the small group have publicly provided to him on the margins of the General Assembly. We also call for the committee, whose inclusivity is key, not to be stalled by unbalanced operating rules. It is incumbent on all Syrians, not just the regime in Damascus, to decide on their own constitution.

Finally, the political process cannot be restricted to the constitutional committee alone. This is only the first step in a process consistent with resolution 2254 (2015), which should in particular include an electoral process that is inclusive and credible and the establishment of a safe and neutral environment in Syria. We would also be interested to hear the thoughts of Staffan de Mistura on the regime's implementation of Law 10, which is of particular concern to us.

Secondly, I wish to come back to the situation on the ground. The agreement between Turkey and Russia has temporarily averted the prospect of a major humanitarian disaster. However, it offers the inhabitants of Idlib only a short respite; there are major challenges remaining. We will therefore continue to closely monitor the implementation of the agreement on the ground, calling for a long-term ceasefire. We must also do everything possible to guarantee the protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical personnel, as well as ensuring full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access throughout Syrian territory. It is imperative that humanitarian aid remain independent, neutral and equitable. The objective remains the long-term avoidance of an offensive that would have disastrous migratory, humanitarian and security consequences for Syria and the entire region. Our efforts to avert a tragedy in Idlib must continue in parallel with our commitment to begin the work of the constitutional committee and, ultimately, to initiate a political process. Everything is connected; it is a question of breaking the cycle of violence in Syria and finally creating a space for a true political process.

In that context, what can we do in the coming weeks to support the mediation of the United Nations? France, along with its partners from the small group, strongly advocated the convening as soon as possible of a credible and inclusive constitutional committee to initiate the drafting of a new constitution. That is our road map for laying the groundwork for free and fair elections that are open to the participation of refugees and internally displaced persons, under the supervision of the United Nations, in a safe and neutral environment that protects the rights of Syrians and provides them with concrete guarantees, while preventing the regime from rendering the process meaningless. We will spare no effort to move forward on those priorities, which must unite us all. The members of the small group will continue to fully support the Special Envoy in that regard, and I welcome their participation today.

Let us not close the narrow window of opportunity that has opened for the formation of the constitutional committee, which offers the hope of initiating a political process aimed at resolving the Syrian crisis. If these efforts do not prove successful, we will return to square one, and 10 months of diplomatic efforts — including on the part of the Astana guarantors — will all have been in vain. The process of ending the crisis, with the return of refugees and the reconstruction that must accompany it, will be blocked over the long term before it has even begun. It is therefore time to use the next few weeks to ensure the convening of the first meeting of the committee. Given the gravity of the situation, waiting to see is not an option. That must be our common priority today, around which, on behalf of France, I call on all the members of the Council to unite.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I thank the Special Envoy for his briefing and for all the work that he and his team do on the ground. I learn with personal regret of his intention to move on, much as I understand the reasons, and I will come back to that, if I may.

However, the Council and the entire United Nations owe him a tremendous debt because he has persisted with one of the most difficult portfolios that, I think, any representative of the Secretary-General can have in any conflict, and he has done so for four long years. We thank him very much for that. As I said, I will come back to that later. The war itself has gone on for even longer than his tenure. I think that he is the third Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, and the war has continued for seven very long, very gruesome and very awful years for the Syrian people.

I will start with Idlib, which represents a terribly important moment because 3 million civilians remain at risk there. We salute the work that the Turkish Government has done, working with the Russians to get the current situation in Idlib under control. If I may cite the Emergency Relief Coordinator, we hope that that is a reprieve and not a stay of execution. However, I think that everyone on the Council remains fearful that the Idlib agreement will not hold. My first point is therefore that the Council should do everything that it can to support the Special Envoy and Turkey in having the Idlib agreement be preserved.

Secondly, as the French Ambassador said, the humanitarian situation still remains very difficult and very challenging. There has been progress in certain areas, but it is not the case that aid is reaching all those who are truly in need. We therefore also call on everyone on the Council to redouble efforts to support the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Committee of the Red Cross and others in getting aid through. We call on the Russian and Syrian Governments to ensure that the aid is delivered on the basis of impartiality and need.

As the Special Envoy said, Idlib represents not only the potential salvation of 3 million civilians but also a window of opportunity for the peace process. My United States and French colleagues set out very clearly how that could be taken forward. I just want to add the United Kingdom's voice to what they said. The Special Envoy described exactly how the constitutional committee should be constituted, how it might work and the sort of matters that it could look at. Under resolution 2254 (2015), that was supposed to have been set up within six months.

Frankly, on our side, it defies belief that the Syrian Government cannot work with what the Special Envoy has set out. I agree with the United States representative that the fact that the Syrian Government cannot work with the constitutional committee as set out either calls into question Russian good faith in brokering that deal in Sochi in the first place or shows that the Russian Government does not have power and influence in Syria. I think that both those things are quite dangerous for the potential of the Syrian political process and that we should spend some time thinking through the consequences of there being no progress at all on the constitutional committee.

Even at this stage, we would appeal to the Syrian authorities to make every conceivable effort to work with the United Nations to bring the constitutional committee into being along the lines that the Special Envoy set out. We completely agree with him and the Secretary-General that the United Nations cannot be involved in this charade and that the constitutional committee must be a genuinely credible and representative process. As the French Ambassador said, it is not the only part of the political process. Working with the United Nations on a broader political process is not a threat to Syria's sovereignty, territorial integrity or unity. All the experience of the Council over very many decades — but, in recent times, from the Balkans to Africa and the Middle East — shows that where there is conflict that is as divisive, as awful and as damaging as the Syrian conflict has been for the past seven years, there needs to be a representative political process if the country is to be stable and coherent and, above all, for it to reintegrate back into the international community. I assume that the Syrian people really want those things.

We therefore take the opportunity today to call on the Syrian authorities to put aside self-interest and to engage with United Nations and the broader political process. We call on them to ensure sustained humanitarian access, as I said earlier, but we also call on them to put an end to policies and practices that create obstacles to displaced people and refugees returning home and rebuilding their lives. We call on them to start progress towards creating a safe and neutral environment, in which all Syria's communities, regardless of religion or ethnicity, can thrive and be fairly represented.

Moving on to the Special Envoy's visit to Damascus. I hope that he goes with the Council's full support in delivering the Secretary-General's clear and direct message to the Syrian authorities. We thank him for the offer to come back to the Council and to brief us further. As others have said, it is of such vital

importance that we seize this opportunity. The Special Envoy will always be welcome in the Council at any time, but I hope that he will err on the side of keeping the Council updated as to how his talks are going.

The Special Envoy mentioned the Brussels conference. I again want to be very clear: the sort of reintegration of Syria into the international community and the coherence and stability that need to flow from a genuinely representative political process will need money for reconstruction, including from the West. That is also a lesson of all conflicts that we have dealt with collectively over the past few decades. I take this opportunity to reiterate — as I am sure the Brussels event will — that we will not provide reconstruction assistance for Syria absent a credible political process leading to a settlement that is genuinely in the interests of all Syria's communities. To do otherwise would be to see the awful seven years that have bedevilled Syria repeated time and again until we are all locked in the most vicious of spirals. Syria needs to overcome the factors that, seven years ago, led in the first place to the conflict with which we are now all struggling. That cannot be done by ignoring help from the United Nations or by it turning its back on the international community. I hope that the Syrian representative will be able to transmit those messages to his authorities in advance of the Special Envoy's visit to Damascus.

I will save a fuller tribute to the work of the Special Envoy for when we get his final thoughts and advice on what follows in the future after November. I welcome the fact that he has said that he will be honest, direct and clear. We look forward to that.

We hope that he will give us unvarnished advice on what to do next. We hope that the outcome of that will be a way in which the United Nations can assist the people of Syria in coming to a political settlement, but we must also contemplate other scenarios, unless we see movement from the Syrian authorities. It is a defining moment. I hope that the Council will be able to support him fully, and I look forward to hearing his future account.

I would like to close by expressing our deepest thanks on behalf of the British Government for everything that he has done in working for the United Nations on this most difficult of dossiers.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to thank you, Madam President, for holding this meeting. We also thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his detailed and comprehensive briefing, and we renew our appreciation and support for all the efforts that he is making to activate and advance a political settlement, especially his most recent efforts to establish a constitutional committee. I would like to join Ambassador Karen Pierce of the United Kingdom in taking this opportunity to express our deep appreciation for the intensive and earnest efforts that Mr. Staffan de Mistura has made over the past four years in his very difficult task. We also commend his commitment to continue working until the very last day of his mandate.

The international community finds itself at an important and sensitive stage of the political process to resolve the Syrian crisis. As my colleague the Ambassador of France has said, we are now at a crossroads. On one side, we see a bright and illuminated path with clearly defined landmarks, in accordance with the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and Security Council resolution 2254 (2015). That path gives us hope that we can put an end to the crisis that Syria has been enduring for the past eight years. On the other side of that crossroads, we find a dark and difficult path riddled with obstacles and fabricated impediments, which could take us back to square one.

Nine months after an agreement was reached in Sochi to form a constitutional committee, and after many rounds of negotiations over the three lists with the relevant parties, we had hoped to see a launching of the committee's work. However, it is clear, as we have just heard from the Special Envoy, that no progress has been made. In that context, we hope that the visit of Special Envoy De Mistura to Damascus next week, which he just announced in his statement, will lead to results that will facilitate the launch of the committee's work. We look forward to hearing his briefing on the outcome of his visit soon.

We call for an intensification of efforts aimed at an early launch of the work of a credible constitutional committee that is inclusive of all segments of Syrian society. We believe that this would constitute an important landmark in the Syrian political process and would push it forward. It is a first step in a political transition that would include drafting a constitution and holding free and fair elections in accordance with such a new constitution, under the supervision of the United Nations and in line with the highest international standards of transparency and accountability. We hope that all Syrians, including members of the diaspora, will

participate in the elections, in keeping with resolution 2254 (2015).

We were on the brink of a humanitarian disaster a month and a half ago because of a potential military escalation in the province of Idlib, which is home to approximately 3 million people, most of whom are innocent civilians. The Council, which has adopted a policy of preventive diplomacy, played an important role in shining a spotlight on Idlib by holding a series of meetings dealing with the possibility of a humanitarian crisis in the event of a military escalation in Idlib. We all followed the agreement that was reached in the Russian-Turkish memorandum of understanding, which helped de-escalate the situation and averted what we had most feared. As the deadline for that memorandum of understanding draws near, we call for intensifying efforts to sustain the ceasefire, not just in the province of Idlib but throughout Syria, pursuant to resolution 2401 (2018), which was unanimously adopted by the Council in February to protect civilians and guarantee unimpeded humanitarian access to those in need throughout Syria.

The State of Kuwait reaffirms today, and every day, that there is no solution to the crisis in Syria other than a political one that is agreed by all segments of the Syrian population, achieves their legitimate aspirations and preserves the unity, independence and sovereignty of Syria.

In closing, as I mentioned earlier, we are at a crossroads, and the next few days will determine the path that the political process will take. There is an urgent need for international political will and intensified diplomatic efforts by all parties at the highest levels over the next few days in order to achieve a political settlement and to put an end to the suffering of the Syrian people and the repercussions of that destructive crisis on the stability and security of the region and the entire world.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to thank Special Envoy De Mistura for his briefing. I appreciate his tireless efforts in seeking a political settlement to the question of Syria.

The political process in Syria has recently gained positive momentum. The memorandum of understanding on the stabilization of the situation in Idlib's de-escalation zone, which was signed by Russia and Turkey, is, in broad strokes, being smoothly implemented. Heavy weapons and armed groups are being withdrawn from demilitarized zones. China welcomes the gradual stabilization of the situation in Idlib and appreciates the efforts made by Russia and Turkey.

We hope that the ceasefire in Syria will be sustained, thereby creating the conditions for the establishment of the constitutional committee and Geneva peace talks. China also welcomes the reopening of border crossing points between Syria and Jordan, which will restore a major trade channel in the Middle East.

The political process in Syria still faces challenges. Terrorism continues to threaten the security and stability of Syria and to hamper reconstruction and the return of refugees. The international community must remain united, coordinate its efforts, cut the supply chain of funds and weapons to terrorists, prevent the resurgence of terrorism and consolidate the achievements made in counter-terrorism. China has always believed that political negotiations are the only feasible solution to the question of Syria.

First, the international community should seize the opportunity offered by the alleviation of the situation in Syria and revitalize the political process there. The key now is to work steadily to establish the Syrian constitutional committee, which must be representative of and acceptable to all. The international community should remain committed to the mediation efforts taken up by the United Nations and Special Envoy De Mistura, relaunch the Geneva peace talks as soon as possible, further leverage the role of the Astana process and facilitate full dialogue and consultations among all the parties in Syria.

Secondly, the countries of the region should take action based on their long-time interest in the overall stabilization of the region and play a constructive role in seeking a political settlement. Achieving peace and stability throughout the entire territory of Syria remains an arduous task. We hope that all the parties will fully respect the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, jointly ensure the effective functioning of the Idlib demilitarized zone, stabilize the overall situation in Syria and create the necessary conditions and environment for its political process.

Thirdly, the Syrian Government and the opposition parties must proceed in accordance with the fundamental interests of the country and its people, the principle of a Syrian-led and -owned process and resolution 2254 (2015). They must promote the political

process, settle differences through negotiations, foster national reconciliation and work gradually to arrive at a political settlement that fits with Syria's reality and addresses the legitimate concerns of all the parties, whom we encourage to initiate measures conducive to reconciliation and enhance mutual trust.

China is ready to join hands with the international community to further support the political process in Syria and to contribute to improving the humanitarian situation in Syria and restoring peace and stability in the country and the region.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are grateful for the convening of this meeting and we thank Mr. De Mistura for his important briefing.

We have been closely following developments in Syria in the wake of the agreement reached in September between Turkey and the Russian Federation on the establishment of a demilitarized zone in Idlib, which has averted the humanitarian disaster we all feared. We emphasize the important role that Turkey and the Russian Federation have been called on to play in order to guarantee the ceasefire. In that regard, we want to point out that their efforts must be guided by international humanitarian law and by the need to respect the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic.

We also want to highlight the removal of heavy artillery from the demilitarized zone and encourage the parties to make further progress in implementing the agreement, thereby encouraging an easing of tensions and improving the necessary ability to distinguish between civilians, rebel groups and terrorists. We believe that this progress should bring the parties to the conflict to a situation that is more conducive to achieving a political settlement with prospects for a lasting peace in Syria. In that regard, the international community is hoping that an inclusive, credible and representative constitutional committee will be established and can start work. More than eight months after the Sochi National Dialogue Congress, we hope that a date can be set for the commencement of the committee's work, as indicated by the Special Envoy. We hope that the upcoming meeting in Geneva between the Astana guarantors and the Special Envoy, as well as their consultations in Damascus, will produce tangible results with regard to the committee's formation, operating mechanisms and decision-making. We note that further delays would pose a genuine risk to the credibility and legitimacy of the process.

We also believe that confidence-building and reconciliation measures should be adopted between the parties. In particular, we expect to see substantive developments in identifying missing persons, the handing over of human remains and the release of detainees and missing persons. It will also be essential to address the plight of the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, which will require the political will and adequate financial resources needed to ensure their return under safe conditions and in a dignified manner, in accordance with internationally accepted standards. Their property rights must also be respected. We would also like to remind all parties of the importance of making progress on accountability for the heinous crimes committed during the protracted Syrian conflict.

I want to stress how important it is that the Astana guarantors and other countries with influence over the parties to the conflict help to prevent further escalation and take concrete measures, such as the commencement of work by the constitutional committee, to advance the political process in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Lastly, I must mention our special gratitude to and recognition of Mr. De Mistura for the hard work he has continued to do not only to achieve a political solution, but also to avoid escalations that could have caused the Syrian people further suffering, as we have witnessed in recent months. We are saddened by the announcement of his departure, but we understand his reasons, and we hope we will still be able to count on his valuable counsel and experience.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): I would like to thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his very comprehensive briefing, and to express Poland's gratitude for his efforts to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis. I would like to reiterate Poland's support, especially at this crucial time in his consultations with the various parties. I would also like to share some reflections with the Council.

The conflict in Syria has caused suffering to millions of people who are forced to find refuge in other countries and who face starvation and armed offensives inside Syria, along with constant violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. In a broader political perspective, we welcome the agreement on

Idlib between Russia and Turkey. At the same time, Poland wants to point out that it is the duty of the Astana guarantors to protect the most recent de-escalation zone in Syria, which they made a commitment to safeguard. The measures necessary to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure must be ensured.

We strongly believe that the Idlib ceasefire agreement is an opportunity for the resumption without delay of the political process under United Nations auspices in Geneva. In that regard, we express our full support for the Special Envoy's efforts to establish a constitutional committee as soon as possible. As has been repeatedly said in this Chamber, it should be implemented right now as a priority, and further steps should swiftly follow in order to enable a negotiated political transition process. It requires the full and constructive engagement of all the parties to the conflict, especially the Syrian authorities, in participating in the negotiations in good faith and without preconditions.

Let me conclude by underlining that a political solution must be brokered in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). There is no military solution to the conflict that can bring sustainable peace to the Syrians, and we should focus on achieving an intra-Syrian framework political agreement. It is for the Syrians themselves to negotiate, and that is why we desperately need to revive the United Nations political process in Geneva. Only a real, tangible political process that ensures the true representation of the Syrian people can set a timetable and provide procedures for drafting a constitution and conducting free and fair elections supervised by the United Nations.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): We thank Special Envoy de Mistura for his comprehensive and very informative briefing today. My country acknowledges and greatly values his unfailing commitment to seeking a peaceful solution and progress for Syria.

Kazakhstan therefore welcomes the memorandum signed on 17 September in Sochi by the Defence Ministers of Russia and Turkey on stabilizing the situation in the de-escalation zone in Idlib in Syria. We call on all the parties in Syria to cooperate in implementing the agreement and ensuring safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to all areas through the most direct routes. We stress the need to forge a durable political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015).

We hope that the agreements reached in Sochi are expeditiously implemented, with full respect for international humanitarian law and the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria, based on the preference for continued dialogue. This option is timely for preserving and consolidating what has been achieved, and we are convinced that the agreement has created an opportunity to jump-start political talks.

Thanks to recent positive developments, we estimate that across much of the country the situation is now calmer than it was before. But we agree that humanitarian needs remain substantial and call on Member States to come forward to mitigate the situation. We commend the Special Envoy's attempts to involve different States of the Middle East, the Gulf region and Europe in this process. In the current phase, the coordination of regional and international efforts should take advantage of the momentum in this regard, in order to promote the innovative regional paradigm that is needed to support both the Geneva and Astana processes. We must take all necessary measures to uphold the ceasefire and promote the peace process.

Kazakhstan underlines the importance of achieving a political solution in Syria, especially through the formation of a genuinely credible and inclusive constitutional committee as a major step towards reaching a political settlement to the crisis. Astana fully supports the Special Envoy's efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive settlement, especially in the crucial months ahead, and looks forward to achieving tangible results. We wholeheartedly wish the Special Envoy a fruitful visit to Damascus next week.

We also emphasize that it is the Syrians themselves who should begin to shape the future political system of the Syrian State, with the necessary legislative reforms, a territorial and administrative structure, and presidential and parliamentary elections. Only a politico-diplomatic approach, confidence-building measures and political goodwill — in the spirit the Charter of the United Nations and Security Council documents on preventive diplomacy and sustaining peace — can bring proper and full results.

There is therefore a strong need to continue supporting the aims of the Astana talks and additional Geneva negotiations in order to see positive outcomes. We believe that the Syrian people are capable of determining their own future. However, fulfilling their

aspirations for democracy, reconstruction and stability is impossible without genuine international support.

Finally, based on its analysis of recent events, Astana believes that the evolution of the situation in Syria has laid the foundation for a qualitative change for the better — the final elimination of terrorists on the country's territory, the beginning of a real political process, the revival of economic activity and the return of refugees to their homeland.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): First, I would like to thank the Special Envoy for his very clear and comprehensive briefing. I also wish to convey our deep appreciation for his persistence and resilience and for his continuous efforts in the last years to bring us closer to a political solution. We welcome his commitment to going the extra mile in the remainder of his term in office. We will miss him.

I would like to focus on three points today — first, the need to swiftly convene the constitutional committee; secondly, the need for sustained de-escalation in Idlib; and thirdly, the need to address issues related to reconstruction aid and the return of refugees.

On my first point, the convening of the constitutional committee is long overdue. There have been too many delays. The committee should convene as soon as possible and move ahead with the creation of a new Constitution. The constitutional committee is not a goal in itself: as others have said, it is part of the broader United Nations-led political process based on resolution 2254 (2015). Only when the constitutional committee itself is credible can one speak of a credible political process. Inclusiveness and representation of all Syrians is key. We repeat our strong support for the Special Envoy in this regard.

We are concerned about the Syrian regime's actions, which have led to the delay in the establishment of the constitutional committee. We support Mr. De Mistura's commitment to having women constitute 30 per cent of the committee's members. In our view, any future drafting subcommittee should also include having a floor of women's representation set at 30 per cent. We feel very strongly that the Security Council should unite behind the Envoy's ambition to convene the committee soon.

That brings me to my second point, the need for sustained de-escalation in Idlib. We welcome that the memorandum agreed between the Russian Federation and Turkey has largely been respected. It has led to de-escalation in the area. It is now important that the agreement be sustained. We are concerned about signals from Damascus that the current situation is only temporary. We must do all we can to prevent an all-out offensive, as that could only lead to an international confrontation and a humanitarian catastrophe.

Unimpeded and unconditional access for principled humanitarian assistance is absolutely necessary. This applies both to cross-border and cross-line assistance, and it should be based on independently assessed needs. We are concerned that the Organization's humanitarian access continues to be constrained in areas where the regime has reasserted control, such as in eastern Ghouta and Quneitra. We feel that it is important that the Russian Federation use its influence to ensure that the Syrian Government facilitates the Organization's sustained and unfettered humanitarian access.

That brings me to my third point — issues related to reconstruction aid and the return of refugees. We strongly disagree with premature calls for reconstruction aid and the return of refugees. There will be no reconstruction aid from the European Union for Syria until there is a lasting political transition in Syria. It is inconceivable to start rebuilding when the possibility of a massive attack still looms over Idlib. We acknowledge the positive developments for the civilians of Idlib from the Russian-Turkish agreement, but we have to be realistic — the situation can change rapidly. It is inconceivable that the international community will rebuild a country in the absence of a negotiated political solution.

The international community should not normalize relations with a regime that is credibly suspected of perpetrating crimes against humanity and of war crimes. We need accountability for those crimes. Let me stress again our support to the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, a French initiative on fighting impunity. We see the referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court as the best path forward to fighting impunity.

Let me also refer to the statement made by eminent jurists on 24 September that sets out clear standards for reconstruction in Syria. These jurists' legal opinion is that "without adherence to these standards, the

provision of reconstruction assistance can facilitate past, continuous or new violations of international law, which would in turn give rise to complicity or shared international responsibility."

With regard to premature calls for the return of refugees, Syria is simply not ready for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees. Voluntary return can only be facilitated when the internationally agreed protection thresholds are in place. The involvement of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is crucial for monitoring the protection of Syrian civilians. Many Syrians cannot go back. They fear the lack of security. They fear retributive violence, persecution and imprisonment. They fear security screenings and forced conscription. They often have no homes to return to due to the consequences of housing, land and property laws, such as Law Number 10, which is currently being implemented, despite earlier reports that its implementation had been suspended. Arbitrary arrests that contradict reconciliation agreements are another reason that Syrian refugees fear going back.

Furthermore, we are concerned about the recent amnesty law, as it does not differ from previous amnesty laws. The biggest flaws remain the same — the law is not applicable to opposition fighters nor does it provide for exemption from military service. It seems the Al-Assad regime adopted this amnesty law to extend its ability to recruit new troops.

Our focus needs to be on real confidence-building measures. The regime should release those unlawfully held in detention, reveal the fate of the missing and prevent further forced disappearances and detentions. So far, it has not done any of these things.

The approach to detainees must be part of a comprehensive political solution — not an afterthought. Securing the release of detainees is critical to Syria's future. Release can build confidence and can provide hope for reconciliation. The issue needs to be properly addressed with genuine progress under the auspices of the United Nations, as part of the official United Nations-led process in Geneva. The United Nations, and in particular the UNHCR, needs access to those currently detained in detention facilities. That could be a start.

In conclusion, it is clear that fundamental structural changes are needed in the administration of Syria. An inclusive political transition must be the starting point, and the convening of the constitutional committee is an important first step. There should be no reconstruction aid before a lasting political transition takes place. Last but not least, there is no peace without justice.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I would like to start by thanking Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his comprehensive and forward-looking update to the Security Council today. We commend his continuous and tireless efforts towards reaching a political solution and bringing an end to the conflict in Syria. I want to echo the regret other speakers have expressed about his mission coming to an end, and, naturally, to send him a very strong message of admiration and gratitude for the work he has done. Of course, the mission remains ongoing, and, as always, we stand behind him fully. He has our full support, including for the way ahead he has outlined today and the immediacy with which he will pursue it in coming weeks.

We welcome the fact that Turkey and Russia have reached an agreement on a ceasefire in Idlib. A military offensive in Idlib would not only have catastrophic humanitarian consequences, but it would also have put at risk a political solution. We now look to the Astana guarantors to live up to their commitments as well as their obligations under international law, and to safeguard the last remaining de-escalation zone in Syria until a peaceful settlement can be reached.

The ceasefire in Idlib offers an opportunity to reinvigorate the United Nations-led political process. This is an opportunity that must be seized. As agreed by the Council, the first step towards a sustainable political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), is the establishment of a constitutional committee. We must now join efforts, support and insist on the swift establishment of the committee. The Special Envoy has full authority to decide on its composition, procedures and time frame, as well as our support.

It is critical that the constitutional committee is credible, balanced and representative of the Syrian people and reflects the diversity of the country. It needs to include Syrians from different ethnic, religious and geographical backgrounds in order to meet those criteria. Furthermore, women's full, effective and substantive participation is important for the legitimacy of the committee. We support the Special Envoy's determination expressed here today to ensure that a minimum of 30 per cent of committee and subcommittee members are women, including

the subcommittee that will draft the constitutional reform. Women's meaningful participation is — as we all know — necessary for sustainable peace and development in Syria — as elsewhere.

In line with the express support of the Council for the swift establishment of the constitutional committee, we encourage the Special Envoy to continue his efforts to set up the committee as quickly as possible. We therefore call on the Syrian parties, in particular the Syrian Government, to engage constructively with the Special Envoy and to contribute to the United Nations-led process as well as within the committees' proceedings once convened. We also expect all members of the Council and other relevant actors to move from words to action and actively support the efforts of the Envoy and his mandate to set up and decide on the composition of the committee. We note the envisaged visit to Damascus next week and welcome Mr. De Mistura's offer to update the Council on progress immediately after the visit has been completed. Needless to say, the content and assessment of that report will be very important.

The Syrian people have endured unspeakable suffering for too long. The agreement on Idlib has delivered some modest but concrete and much-needed relief. The agreement can and should be used to reinvigorate the United Nations-led political process. Only the United Nations has the legitimacy and the credibility for a viable and enduring political solution in line with resolution 2254 (2015). As others have said, Syria has reached a fork in the road. As Council members we must shoulder our responsibility and send a strong and unified message in support of United Nations efforts. We must also step up our joint efforts towards the road that leads to a credible political solution.

Mr. Woldegerima (Ethiopia): We join others in thanking the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his comprehensive briefing today. We very much appreciate and support his untiring diplomatic endeavours to relaunch a credible political process with a view to resolving the Syrian crisis. We know that his has not been an easy job, and we understand his decision to move on. But we continue to support him in his efforts in the coming days, which are going to be very critical.

Last month, the Council expressed its concern about a possible humanitarian catastrophe in Idlib (see S/PV.8345). This potential humanitarian tragedy has been averted due to the agreement reached between the Presidents of Turkey and Russia to establish a demilitarized zone in Idlib. In this regard, we recognize that measures are being taken to implement the agreement.

At the same time, as can be expected in such complex situations, we also understand that there are challenges to fully operationalizing the agreement within the set deadlines. What is important is to continue to work together to sustain the implementation of this important agreement. In this regard, we appreciate and support the continued efforts of Turkey and Russia. All those members that have influence should also support the full implementation of the agreement. In addition, enhancing international coordination to combat terrorism also remains important.

As the Special Envoy said, the stabilization of the situation in Idlib should be taken as a window of opportunity for reinvigorating the political process, without which there cannot be a sustainable way to address the Syrian crisis. In this regard, since the outcome of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress held in Sochi, we understand the Special Envoy has been conducting a series of extensive consultations with Syrian actors and concerned Member States on the formation of the constitutional committee, which is indeed necessary as the process has to be truly inclusive.

While appreciating the Special Envoy's continued engagement with all stakeholders, we also believe that all actors should fully support his efforts to finalize the establishment process of the committee, which we believe should be credible and Syrian-owned. As is well-known, the constitutional committee is only one element in the Syrian political process, important though it may be. Indeed, the formation of the committee should be a stepping stone for relaunching the Geneva political process in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

It is therefore time for all Syrian parties to constructively engage with the Special Envoy to establish the committee as soon as possible. In this regard, we welcome the invitation extended by the Syrian Government to the Special Envoy. As he mentioned, we hope his visit to Syria will be productive and meaningful, leading to concrete outcomes that will move the process forward. We look forward to hearing from him next month. In addition, the Special Envoy's continued consultations with the Astana guarantors and the small-group countries could contribute to speeding up the process of the formation of the committee. The

Council should also demonstrate its unity and continue extending its full support for the tireless efforts of the Special Envoy.

In conclusion, we all agree that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. Therefore, finding a comprehensive political solution remains urgent and critical, not only for the sake of the people of Syria, whose legitimate aspirations and concerns should be addressed, but also for regional and international peace and security. The international community, particularly the Security Council, should work together in support of the facilitation role of the Special Envoy for whom we reiterate our appreciation and support.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes today's meeting on the political process in the Syrian Arab Republic and thanks Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his informative briefing and for his efforts in the service of peace.

Côte d'Ivoire notes with satisfaction the signing in Sochi on 17 September, under the auspices of the Russian Federation and Turkey, of the agreement providing for a demilitarized zone between the territories under the control of the Syrian armed forces and those held by armed groups. My delegation is pleased that the deadline of 10 October for the withdrawal of all heavy weapons from the zone has been met. Compliance with this agreement by all stakeholders will unquestionably prevent a large-scale offensive that could lead to a new humanitarian tragedy in a country devastated by more than seven years of armed conflict. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 13.1 million Syrians are in need of humanitarian assistance, 5.6 million Syrian refugees are living outside the country and 6.1 million are internally displaced.

My delegation believes that the effective implementation of the agreement on the demilitarized zone could create the conditions for a resumption of the intra-Syrian dialogue and help to advance the peace process, which is the only way to achieve a peaceful and lasting solution to the crisis in Syria. In this context, Côte d'Ivoire supports the Special Envoy's proposals and welcomed the meetings held at his initiative on 11 and 12 September, with the guarantors of the Astana process, and on 14 September with senior officials from Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. They represented an opportunity to discuss the establishment of the constitutional committee responsible for drafting the new Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic and defining the modalities for free and transparent elections, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), on the road map for the Syrian political process.

Côte d'Ivoire also takes note of the joint statement of Egypt, France, Germany, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, the small-group members, made at the margins of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly. The statement, which calls for convening a credible and inclusive constitutional committee as soon as possible, once again demonstrates the international community's interest in the smooth conduct of the Syrian political process. In that context, Côte d'Ivoire invites all Syrian parties to give priority to the dialogue for a negotiated solution to the current impasse. We also reaffirm our commitment to the principle of accountability so that armed persons or groups guilty of serious violations of international humanitarian law and of human rights can be brought before the competent international courts.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire calls for unity in the Security Council with a view to contributing effectively to the settlement of the Syrian crisis, which has gone on for too long.

Mr. Sipaco Ribala (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Equatorial Guinea welcomes the convening of today's meeting and thanks Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his informative briefing. We join the previous delegations in thanking him and expressing our gratitude for the firm commitment and passion he has shown as Special Envoy. We hope that under Mr. De Mistura's leadership a representative and much-desired constitutional committee will be established before he retires as Special Envoy.

We welcome the participation of several member countries of the contact group in today's debate. The Government of my country believes that it is essential for the Security Council and the international community to listen carefully to the actors and countries involved or directly or indirectly affected by these long years of conflict.

On 18 September, Equatorial Guinea, along with several other countries, applauded the signing of the agreement between Russia and Turkey on the establishment of a demilitarized zone in Idlib, which has undoubtedly prevented a large-scale offensive

with catastrophic consequences for Syria and the region, and has given a major boost to the ongoing peace negotiations. We welcome the removal of heavy weapons from the future demilitarized zone in time to meet the deadline agreed in the agreement. However, the most difficult task continues to be convincing the jihadist groups to definitively abandon the area. We call on all parties to the conflict not to weaken the agreement and to accept the conditions agreed in Sochi. In order to do that, they must refrain from armed provocations and take the path towards a peaceful settlement of the situation in the areas under their control.

Equatorial Guinea sees no alternative to the political process in Syria. We will continue to insist on the facilitation of the political process in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015). The demilitarization of Idlib has changed the tone of efforts aimed at settling the conflict, making it more political than military. Indeed, since the signing of the agreement, there have been fewer clashes between the Syrian army and armed opposition groups, and that should enable the political process to move forward.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the importance of making progress in the search for a political settlement based on negotiations and of establishing an intra-Syrian constitutional committee, under the leadership of the Special Envoy, as soon as possible. However, while we should always respect the sovereignty and independence of the Syrian people, priority should be given to the quality of the composition of the constitutional committee so as to make it impossible for external forces to impose plans that have not been agreed to by the Syrian people or their legitimate representatives, as has been stressed on numerous occasions.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his briefing. It is not yet time to bid him farewell, and we will postpone that for now, because he has promised to work on this matter up to the last minute.

Recently in Syria we have seen a trend towards stabilization associated with the liberation of a greater part of the country's territory from the terrorist presence At this stage, Syrians need international support in re-establishing an economy that has been destroyed by the war. The citizens of Syria who are endeavouring to return to their homeland should be getting genuine support from the specialized international agencies. We strongly urge our partners to be guided on these issues by the interests of ordinary Syrians and to refrain from artificially tying them to political progress. Otherwise, as with the unilateral sanctions that end up burdening ordinary citizens, it does not match their publicly trumpeted humanitarian slogans. Judging from what we have heard today, however, our urgings are not likely to find a response from our so-called humanitarians.

Russia, Iran and Turkey are the country guarantors of the Astana process and are continuing their close joint work in the interests of a Syrian settlement. We in this Chamber never tire of asking questions of those who tell us haughtily what we have done wrong and what we should do. But what have those here been doing for a Syrian settlement? We know what they discuss in their so-called small group, and the documents that result from their meetings. They have no relation to the Syrian settlement. They are a collection of ultimatums and conditions. We suggest that the small-country group publish the memorandums that they adopt in their meetings and make them accessible to a broad public. We do not want to do it for them. Then we can discuss with them who is trying to launch a Syrian-owned political process and who is dictating to Syrians what their future should be.

The high-level agreement between Russia and Turkey on temporary measures for stabilizing Idlib governorate has had a palpable effect on the situation that is much appreciated by many of those involved — but not all. It seems that some of our partners are never satisfied. Things before the memorandum were bad, and things after the memorandum are also bad. According to what we have heard today, the memorandum would barely have happened if it hadn't been for the efforts of the so-called small group. I want to let the Council know that the memorandum is being implemented in full, and our Turkish colleagues are working very hard to that end. A number of opposition groups have announced their support for the Sochi memorandum. More than 1,000 militants have left the demilitarized zone. A significant quantity of heavy military equipment has been removed, although there are reports that some groups are trying to hide some of it in the mountains.

The situation is not without difficulties, for which the most radical rebel cells, particularly Jabhat Al-Nusra, are to blame. They are trying to undermine the implementation of the memorandum by shelling towns and villages bordering the de-escalation zone, including the western outskirts of Aleppo. We assume

that extreme measures will be applied to incorrigible terrorists. Those who are ready to break with the radicals are being given a good, indeed a unique chance to return to normal society, and they should make that choice as soon as possible.

All international players must respect Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Neither Idlib nor any other part of the country can be seen as some sort of separate entity with special arrangements. Unfortunately, not everyone is complying with those fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The United States representative asked about the motives of the Russian presence and activity in Syria. My answer is that Russia is in Syria at the invitation of its legitimate Government. Our aim is to assist Syria in combating international terrorism. We have no other goals or motives. If I may, I will ask him in return what the basis is for the United States presence in Syria and what its motives are. Are they to combat terrorism, or to create quasi-State entities on the territory of a sovereign country and a springboard for some sort of future action in the region?

There are military bases being built and expanded in Syria, including the notorious Al-Tanf, around which a real terrorist breeding ground has formed. The demographic makeup of north-eastern Syria on the left bank of the Euphrates is being violently reconfigured. The fight against the remaining isolated centres of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is getting nowhere, as if the task of finally defeating the terrorists was not an issue. Now and then the terrorists take over new territories, as is happening in the area of Hajin. From time to time militants are transported somewhere. We do not know what is happening in the areas controlled by the so-called coalition where ISIL members are being held. Are they kept in improvised prisons, prosecuted, returned to their countries of origin? This uncertainty confirms our long-standing suspicions that countering terrorism is only a pretext for maintaining the coalition's military presence in Syria.

As our Syrian colleagues have informed the Security Council, civilians are being killed as a result of the so-called coalition's air strikes on residential areas. We are very concerned about the reports of the use of phosphorous munitions during those bombings, which should be thoroughly investigated. In the territories under the control of the coalition and its local allies, puppet self-governing bodies are being created independently of the authorities in Damascus. What is that if not a blatant violation of Syrian sovereignty through the country's forcible dismemberment? These are neocolonial policies, plain and simple.

We should not omit to mention the ugly story of the fake White Helmet rescuers associated with terrorist organizations. It is they who are some of the main actors in the militants' toxic-substance provocations, which Damascus is then purposely accused of perpetrating. Some of them have been brought out of Syria, but not all of their Western patrons are in a hurry to investigate their clients after analysing their personal affairs. The White Helmets represent a threat to the security of the States of the region, which is why we are asking their patrons to take them away and to hurry up about it. All of them. We wish them luck integrating them into democratic society.

In the meantime, we are pleased to see Damascus and other Middle Eastern capitals finding ways to normalize relations, starting with the most ordinary kind, the human contacts and the trade that have maintained regional ties for thousands of years. The Nasib crossing on Syria's border with Jordan opened just a few days ago. And with the assistance of Russian specialists, work has begun again on the Quneitra crossing after a years-long interruption. There is mutual interest in returning the cross-border interaction between Syria and Iraq to pre-conflict levels. That is a natural process in the interests of the residents of the region, and it would be criminal to interfere with it.

Increased attention is currently focused on forming a constitutional committee on the basis of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress held in Sochi in January. If we are to establish a viable body, which we hope everyone is genuinely interested in, its working parameters require the consent of the Syrian parties. Like other partners, we want to see the committee established as soon as possible, but in this case it will be counterproductive to pursue artificial deadlines, with artificial terms that are artificially introduced. I would like to know why we are not setting deadlines for resolving other crises, such as the Palestinian-Israeli settlement, Yemen or Libya. There, too, let us loudly and fervently demand immediate settlements and set deadlines that do not accord with the interests of the parties or the situations that have evolved. If a process is to be credible, all the parties must agree, and that takes time. So we have to be patient. We simply have to

respect the partners and not demand that they agree to what suits us rather than the parties directly involved in negotiations.

We ask our colleagues from the so-called small group, many of whose participants have not proven themselves in the area of the Syrian settlement, to refrain from unwarranted ultimatums and from putting pressure on the United Nations mediation efforts. While we are open to dialogue, we wonder whether countries that refuse even to talk to the legitimate Syrian Government can play a positive role in supporting the political process.

Mr. De Mistura is well aware that Russia has consistently supported the United Nations efforts for an intra-Syrian settlement and has repeatedly helped it to emerge from what were seemingly hopeless impasses. We have been convinced more than once of his ability to make informed decisions based on his rich diplomatic experience. We hope that his visit to Damascus will be successful. However, we will not stop repeating that for more active progress towards peace in Syria we need to unite the constructive efforts of all the international and regional players with influence and to refrain from confrontation and the execution of geopolitically destructive projects.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I will now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the Plurinational Republic of Bolivia.

We thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Syria, for his briefing and we are grateful for his tireless efforts in a difficult job.

We want to emphasize that in the past few months there has been a reduction in military activity in various regions of the Syrian territory, thanks partly to the Syrian Government's consolidation of its control, but also to the efforts of the Astana guarantors, whose agreements must be reinforced if the aim is to reduce violence and facilitate peace and stability in Syria. In that regard, we are pleased with the results of the agreement between the Russian Federation and Turkey on Idlib governorate, which has allowed a demilitarized zone to be established there. We welcome the fact that although the agreement was in force only until 15 October, it is still valid and has been enabling radical combatants to withdraw from Idlib.

We should reiterate, however, that any action in the fight against terrorism must be conducted within the framework of international law and international humanitarian law in particular, so as to guarantee the protection of civilian lives and of workers from the various humanitarian agencies in the field. We reiterate our support for the Special Envoy's work, and for his conversations with the various parties at a so-called high diplomatic level. In that regard, we will be closely watching the results of his visit to Damascus in the next few days, and if necessary the presidency of the Council will convene a meeting to hear a report on his efforts.

We reiterate that there can be no military solution to the conflict in Syria, and we therefore reject any attempt to provoke fragmentation or sectarianism there, as well as the presence there of external forces with no authorization from the Syrian Government. On the contrary, it is clear that the solution requires the continued implementation of the Sochi final declaration, whose main objective is the establishment of a constitutional committee.

Lastly, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and respect for the principle of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, we call for the resolution of this conflict through an inclusive, dialogue-based and concerted political process, led by and for the Syrian people, that would make it possible to reach a peaceful, lasting solution to the situation in the framework of the Geneva process and resolution 2254 (2015), and under the auspices of the United Nations.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The illegal so-called international coalition led by the United States, in another flagrant violation of international law, international humanitarian law and human rights instruments, has committed yet another crime against innocent Syrian civilians. On 13 and 14 October, the coalition's warplanes targeted residential areas in the Syrian city of Hajin, in Deir ez-Zor governorate, using internationally banned white phosphorus bombs and killing a number of civilian martyrs and injuring others, including women and children.

It is now clear to all that this coalition has fought everything but terrorism. Its practices make it clear that

its goals are in harmony with those of terrorist groups. It has sown chaos, death and destruction. The coalition has defied State authority and helped the Da'esh terrorist organization to move its troops to the area east of the Euphrates in order to carry out its acts of aggression in Syria. If it is to preserve its credibility, the Security Council must launch an immediate investigation into these crimes so as to prevent their recurrence, end the illegal presence of United States and other foreign forces in Syria and stop them carrying out their plans to undermine Syria's sovereignty and unity.

Military and political groups have been established without the participation of the Syrian Government. They are suspect because they do not serve the interests of the Syrian people. On the contrary, they defy the Syrian State and support terrorism under political pretexts. The creation of the Brussels group and the small group, or any other entity in which the Syrian Government does not participate, can only be counterproductive and will not help to achieve progress on the political track, which is supposed to be Syrian-led.

Syria is not under anyone's authority. There will not be another Karzai in Damascus. When a meeting was held in Marrakech on 12 December 2012 for the so-called Group of Friends of the Syrian People, at the initiative of France, at the time the Group included 137 members. Today it has only 12. It failed because it was never a friend of the Syrian people. It is as simple as that. That is why the Syrian Government does not recognize any road map that it is not a party to and that it does not approve. The United Nations must not be part of any political group that stands against Syria and the Syrian Government, because those groups are being created outside the authority of the Security Council by political Powers that support terrorism in Syria and in the region.

The countries that have supported the terrorist war against Syria for the past seven years have convened Council meetings for the purpose of grandstanding, and have exploited the United Nations in an unprecedented manner. There have been hundreds of meetings on Syria, formal and informal, Arria Formula and side events — all kinds of meetings. Those meetings have been held every time the Syrian army has been able to defeat the armed terrorist groups, in order to bring political pressure to bear on the Syrian Government and hinder its progress.

Today we are seeing a new chapter in this policy of blackmail. Following the achievements and progress in Astana, and after the Syrian Government's positive engagement with the outcomes of the Sochi Congress, those same countries sought to create an illegal group, known as the small group, outside the authority of the Security Council, with the aim of blocking any progress in Astana or Sochi, turning back the clock and hindering the political process. The Sochi process is the only one that has borne fruit, and the reason is simple: the Syrian Government was part of the process, and that is why it succeeded. Those countries have tried to portray the group as angelically innocent by giving the impression that all of its members are committed to reaching a peaceful settlement of the crisis in Syria.

I wonder how that group, whose members include countries that have financed and supported armed terrorist groups in Syria, can claim to protect Syrians. I will not go into detail about the actions of every State. The Council is well aware of them. I also wonder how this entity, which includes members that have financed, trained and supported terrorists in Syria and committed multiple acts of aggression against it, can claim to be protecting Syrian lives. How can a group whose members include countries that supply terrorist groups with chemical weapons claim to be protecting Syrians? When I spoke about this issue yesterday in a statement before the First Committee (see A/C.1/73/PV.8), I named the country that provided those terrorist groups with chemical weapons. I am referring to Turkey. How can this group, whose members include countries that have issued jihadi fatwas in support of terrorism, claim that it is protecting Syrians? Is the Council aware of the fact that the Al-Nusra Front has refused to implement the Russian-Turkish agreement, which ended three days ago in Idlib? It refused to do that.

Is the Council aware that the leaders of the Al-Nusra Front — and I am not trying to insult Egypt; I respect its Permanent Representative — are mostly Egyptians and Turks, sent by Morsi to Syria to carry out their jihad in Syria?

The religious leaders of the Al-Nusra Front are now at odds with its political leaders. Its religious leaders do not want to implement the Russian-Turkish agreement because they want the bloodshed to continue.

How can a group that has countries among its members that occupy parts of our territory claim that they are going to protect Syrian lives? There are

American, British, French and Turkish forces on Syrian territory. How can the small group, which calls itself an international coalition, assist us while it occupies parts of our land? How can a group whose members have Syrian blood on their hands claim to protect Syrian lives?

Instead of preaching to the Council, we ask it for answers. We need clear answers and a specific position taken by the Security Council against the presence of illegal foreign forces on our land. We need it to take a position against terrorism and against sponsoring and financing terrorism. We need a position that respects the Syrian Government, instead of one that creates vacuum by pushing for a failed State, thereby helping to spread terrorism across the region.

I find it necessary to remind some members of Chapter I, Article 2, paragraph 7 of the Charter of the United Nations, which states that "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State...". Perhaps this Article belongs to the charter of the planet Mars rather than the United Nations, because some members seem to have forgotten about it.

The Syrian Government has emphasized its readiness to positively respond to all initiatives that would help the Syrians end the crisis, as long as they respect national principles, including the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and unity of Syria and its people; give the Syrian people the exclusive right to determine the future of their country without any foreign interference; and reject the presence of terrorism on Syrian territories. All of these beautiful words appear in Council resolutions on Syria. I did not make them up. That is what Security Council resolutions state. They have also been mentioned in statements made today in this Chamber.

The Syrian Government engaged positively and with openness in the Geneva discussions, the Astana process and in the Syrian National Dialogue Congress, held in Sochi. However, the other parties stalled. They rejected dialogue, invested in terrorism and foreign interference and sought to undermine Syrian sovereignty and resilience. Today, we listened to the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands as he outlined a number of conditions. He said that it is too early to talk about reconstruction, too early for the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, too early to lift the unilateral and coercive economic measures, too early to address the humanitarian situation in certain parts of Syria and therefore too early to end terrorism. Despite everything, the Syrian Government continues to positively engage in implementing the outcomes of the Syrian National Dialogue Congress held in Sochi on the formation of a constitutional committee to review the current Constitution. We do not want a constitutional vacuum because Syria is not a failed State.

The Syrian Government presented a practical and comprehensive vision on the composition, prerogatives and working methods of the committee and submitted to the Special Envoy a list of representatives supported by the Syrian State. We underscore in that regard that the mandate of the Committee is limited to reviewing the articles of the current Constitution through a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process. We stress that the Special Envoy must respect his mandate as a facilitator of the committee. No preconditions should be imposed on it nor should its recommendations be prejudged. The Committee must be independent since the Constitution and all relevant matters are Syrian issues to be decided upon by Syrians themselves. We will therefore not accept any proposal that interferes in the internal affairs of Syria or that leads to that end. We stand ready to work actively with friendly countries to launch the committee along the parameters I have just mentioned.

My country welcomed the agreement reached in Sochi on 17 September with regard to the city of Idlib because we are committed to stopping the bloodshed. The agreement came as a result of intensive consultations between Syria and Russia and with full coordination between the two countries. We hope that it will bear fruit and that the Turkish regime will uphold its side of the deal. We stress that the agreement is time-bound and includes clear deadlines. It complements all previous agreements on the de-escalation zones that resulted from the Astana process. Just like any region in Syria, the city of Idlib will return to the fold of Syrian State sovereignty. In order to achieve sustainable and durable peace in Syria, all illegal foreign forces, including Turkish, American, British, French and Israeli forces, must leave the Syrian territories. We consider all of them to be occupying forces. Their presence on Syrian land runs counter to the Charter, international law and relevant Council resolutions on Syria.

The Syrian Government has never interfered in the internal affairs of any Member State. It has always sought to respect and uphold the principles of

the Charter and of international law. On behalf of my country, I stress today that we will block any attempts of provocation and escalation that undermine our relations with the Arab region and the world. As a result, we have sought to re-open the Nasib border crossing with Jordan. We will also open other border crossings, with Iraq, very soon.

The progress made by Syria and its allies in the war against terrorism has led to new developments in Syria and the region, which must be taken into account in any discussion on my country. It is time for those parties and Powers that support terrorism to review and reconsider their positions and join an international effort to stop supporting this heinous terrorist war. Supporting terrorism is a threat to international peace and security in the long and short run. It is time for all those detached from reality to wake up, let go of their fantasies and come to their senses. They must realize that they will not achieve politically what they failed to achieve through terrorism.

In conclusion, my country continues to seek a political solution that would allow Syrians themselves to make decisions about their future without foreign interference, in a manner that ensures Syria's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. Based on our respect for the role of the United Nations in facilitating Syrian dialogue, my country has invited the Special Envoy to Syria in the coming days to hold discussions on issues related to his mandate.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this meeting and for your efforts throughout your presidency to reinforce the principles on which the United Nations was founded. I also wish to express my thanks and appreciation to Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, for his comprehensive briefing. In that regard, I would like to pay tribute to the relentless efforts he has made and continues to make to achieve a political solution to the crisis in Syria.

All previous approaches to dealing with the Syrian crisis have failed. That is why we need to redouble our honest efforts and put the interests of Syria and its people above all other considerations. Today, this requires the Security Council to step up its work to reach a political solution to this crisis. That solution must be able to preserve the unity and integrity of Syria and be accepted by all Syrians.

Since the beginning of the crisis in Syria, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has worked with the international community to find a peaceful solution that would avoid the destruction of Syria and the displacement of its people. We have also helped to contain the human impact and alleviate the suffering of the brotherly Syrian people, as was clearly reflected in our contribution to the development and adoption of resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014), on the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Jordan will continue to support all multilateral efforts to assist Syria in reaching a political solution. That is why we hope to return to the Geneva process and the implementation of resolution 2254 (2015) so as to preserve the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and create an environment conducive to restoring stability, which will reflect positively on the political settlement and contribute to the return of displaced persons and refugees. In this context, the reopening of the Jaber-Nasib crossing point on the borders between Jordan and Syria is a step that we hope will help achieve stability and pave the way for the voluntary return of refugees to their homes.

In the context of our commitment to the return of stability in Syria, my country reaffirms its full support for the efforts deployed by Mr. De Mistura and the United Nations to reach a solution to this crisis through the formation of a Syrian constitutional committee as soon as possible, thereby launching a political process that would include all Syrian parties and components under the auspices of the United Nations.

My country currently hosts 1.3 million of our Syrian brothers. We have exceeded our absorptive capacity and are doing all we can to support and assist those refugees, despite the enormous pressures of their presence on the national economy. The costs of hosting Syrian refugees, as well as the direct costs of the Syrian crisis to the Kingdom, have now exceeded $10 billion. This amount includes the costs of education, health care and subsidies for electricity, water, sanitation and the use of infrastructure, as well as security and other costs.

We underscore once again that the refugee crisis is a global responsibility. Everyone agrees on that, and it therefore requires an international solution. However, international assistance is not currently covering real

needs. There must be coordinated efforts to ensure the flow of humanitarian assistance within Syria and to support host countries and communities, including Jordan, as we encourage the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their homes as an inevitable outcome. We reaffirm the importance of coordinating efforts to achieve this end through the creation of an atmosphere conducive to the voluntary return of those refugees.

I am confident that the Security Council appreciates the great responsibility and heavy burden it bears in the service of Syria's citizens, who place their hopes in the Council so that their spirits may be reassured and the situation stabilized in order for normal life to be resumed. The international community therefore needs to make further efforts to meet the interests and aspirations of the brotherly Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Edrees (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like at the outset to thank you, Mr. President, for giving us the opportunity today to address the Council and to clarify the Egyptian position at this important stage in the Syrian crisis. I would also like to express our appreciation to Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and thank him for his comprehensive briefing.

Since the early days of the crisis, Egypt has reiterated what everyone has said today — that there is no military solution to this crisis and a settlement in Syria will be achieved only through a political solution that would uphold Syria's sovereignty over its territories within one country for all Syrians. Such a solution would at the same time meet the aspirations of the Syrian people in all its different factions and components and allow them to live in prosperity, freedom and democracy.

Egypt has not reaffirmed this position simply by making statements and slogans; rather we have translated our words into action at every level. In recent years, we have communicated with all Syrian parties in order to facilitate a settlement. We have exerted great efforts to support the voices of the national opposition and to make them heard and heeded in order to counterbalance the voices of extremism that enjoy the funding and support of many other parties. This has given Syrians the opportunity to establish the Cairo platform, which has become a main foundation for the Syrian national opposition.

Egypt has also sponsored many truce agreements in Syria. Moreover, it has positively used its non-permanent membership of the Security Council to contribute to guaranteeing continued humanitarian access to Syrians throughout the country, including Idlib, over two full years. We made strenuous efforts to prevent humanitarian support from being affected by the polarization witnessed in the Security Council during that time. Those efforts were crowned by the adoption of resolution 2393 (2017) concerning cross-border assistance, based on a draft resolution that we penned in cooperation with Sweden and Japan.

Furthermore, since the beginning of the crisis, Egypt has consistently affirmed the need to eradicate terrorism and extremism in Syria. We have warned of the dangers of being lenient with terrorist organizations or politicizing the positions of countries in this regard. We have warned of the dangers of ignoring or turning a blind eye to parties that have transformed parts of Syria into fertile ground for terrorism and extremism. Certain parts of Syria would not have become safe havens for terrorist groups had it not been for the questionable failure of the international community to uphold its duty in this regard, a failure that requires further explanation.

I am compelled to reiterate the same call that we have issued time and time again to all countries, especially the major Powers, to set aside their differences and search for an adequate format, to be coordinated among them, in order to eliminate the presence of terrorist organizations inside Syria. Whether it be the Al-Nusra Front or others, and regardless of their nationalities, those terrorist organizations — in Idlib or elsewhere — must be stopped from spreading beyond Syria to other countries of the region, including Libya, with which we share a border of over 1,000 kilometres. We are not here to simply substitute one safe haven for terrorists with another in a region that has been blighted by disputes and conflicts, external interference and terrorist organizations and militias.

Today, we reaffirm and underscore that the brotherly people of Syria will be able to heal from the damage and the wounds suffered by their country over the past several years only through a comprehensive and inclusive political solution, provided that it is based on international consensus embodied in resolution 2254 (2015) and the United Nations-led Geneva process.

Unfortunately, 10 months have passed since the latest round of negotiations was held within the framework of the Geneva process. That is unacceptable. The lack of progress in the negotiations will simply exacerbate the crisis and hold it hostage to the situation on the ground, which will lead to the further deterioration of the situation and an increase in the number of victims of the Syrian crisis. We must not remain silent in that regard. I reaffirm our rejection of allowing the political process to be held hostage to developments on the ground or of simply succumbing to the delusion of a military solution.

In that context, I reaffirm the content of the statement issued on 27 September at the recent ministerial meeting of the Small Group in New York, on the margins of the General Assembly meetings. The statement called for support for a political solution and the convening of a constitutional committee to that end as soon as possible. I would like to remind the Council that work on the constitutional committee is aimed primarily at facilitating political negotiations by moving forward the activation of one of the four negotiating baskets. Unfortunately, we are witnessing further delays on the political track, which threaten to create additional complications in the crisis and to increase the suffering of our brother people of Syria.

Let me underscore the need for Special Envoy De Mistura to exercise his authority and call for the convening of the first meeting of the constitutional committee without delay, as he indicated earlier that he would, while keeping in mind that the lists for the committee have been drawn up. We also hope that the Special Envoy will brief the Security Council and keep it updated on the progress made, especially following his visit to Damascus.

In conclusion, I underline that Egypt will remain committed to supporting the brotherly people of Syria. Egypt stands ready to provide all forms of support to our Syrian brothers in the next phase of the process, including by providing them with constitutional expertise that could be useful in the coming days. We also express our readiness to work constructively to bring together the various views among Syrian national factions so as to firmly establish the country's sovereignty and ensure the integrity of Syrian territories and the safety of the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your wise leadership of the Security Council for this month, and to wish you continued success. I also thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, for his valuable briefing and for all his tireless efforts over the past four years to find a way out of this crisis. I regret that he has been unable to arrive at a political settlement, due to the obstinacy of the Syrian regime. I hope that Mr. De Mistura will find what he and the international community are seeking during the remaining period of his mission.

My country supports all international and regional efforts to end the current crisis in Syria. We believe that the solution to the Syrian crisis will not be achieved through military operations or chemical weapons, which have wrought the worst forms of destruction upon the Syrian country and people The only solution to the Syrian crisis is political, based on resolution 2254 (2015). My country believes that through its obstinate, procrastinating and belittling attitude, the Syrian regime has obstructed the efforts of international actors to achieve progress through meaningful negotiations. It has hindered the Geneva negotiations, the previous eight rounds of which failed to achieve any tangible progress with regard to restoring Syria to its former status.

My country is part of the small group on Syria, which was established to support the efforts of Special Envoy De Mistura to find a political solution to the crisis. In that regard, we stress the need to step up the establishment of the constitutional committee so that it can begin drafting a new Syrian constitution, and we call on all Syrians inside the country and abroad to elect a Government under the supervision of the United Nations in a credible and inclusive manner. My country reiterates the small group's call for the constitutional committee to begin its work as soon as possible, within the next several weeks. We call on the Syrian regime and all other parties to prioritize the interests of the Syrian people and refrain from hindering in any way the Special Envoy's efforts to form the constitutional committee so that Syria can be saved from its catastrophic crisis.

This is the eighth year of the Syrian crisis, and my country is deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia urges the international community to address that reality with greater responsibility. Since

the beginning of the crisis, the Kingdom has been intensely focused on the human dimension of the crisis and provided every form of support to the Syrian people. For example, my country is hosting more than 2 million Syrians and providing them with employment opportunities, health care and education. It has also provided those who wish to do so with the possibility of moving to other locations. Currently, more than 140,000 male and female Syrian students are attending Saudi universities and schools and being provided with the same benefits as Saudi students.

My country has sought diligently to consolidate the Syrian opposition under the auspices of both Riyadh conferences so that the opposition and the regime can negotiate to ensure the security, stability and unity of Syria and prevent destructive foreign intervention. Moreover, my country has worked with its sister States of the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Arabic Republic of Egypt. We are working together to consolidate an Arab role in finding a solution to the Syrian crisis and provide support for the Syrian people by all possible and available means.

My country rejects any interference in Syria by the Iranian regime, regardless of the form it takes. We reject Iran's support for the Syrian authorities in operations that have led to uprooting people from their homes and demographic change, as well as for the genocide and sectarian mass murder that are being carried out against the Syrian people. We must end those destructive actions, the serious consequences of which have destroyed infrastructure and led to the killing and displacement of many Syrians. The Government of my country believes that the only effective action that Iran can take in the Syrian crisis is to leave Syria and withdraw its Revolutionary Guard and security militias immediately, thereby leaving Syria for the Syrians.

In conclusion, the world must realize that the time has come to change the tragic reality in Syria. The international community must work seriously and with resolve to advance the political process. That would enable us to save what can be saved and pull Syria from the rubble under which it is buried. The cause of that distress is the arrogant and immoral behaviour exhibited by that pathetic regime under the guise of combating terrorism. The regime intentionally ignores the fact that it created a breeding ground for terrorism to spread throughout the country and allowed the greatest sponsor of terrorism, Iran, to enter Syrian territory.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Iran): I would like to begin by wholeheartedly thanking the Bolivian presidency for convening this meeting. No one can forget Bolivia's principled and rational position or its dedication and tireless efforts during its presidency of the Council, which will remain forever in Council history. I also thank Mr. Staffan de Mistura for his efforts and briefing.

The implementation of the agreement to create a demilitarized zone in Idlib continues, in particular thanks to the cooperation of the Syrian Government. To review that process, a ministerial meeting of the Astana guarantor States was convened here in New York on 26 September. It was underscored that every effort should be made for the full implementation of the agreement, and it was emphasized in particular that in order to preserve the Idlib de-escalation zone and to build on that achievement, all terrorists must leave the zone. The guarantor States also reiterated their strong resolve to continue fighting terrorists.

With respect to terrorists, one thing should be made crystal clear: foreign terrorist fighters should return to their country of origin, and terrorists of Syrian origin must be dealt with according to Syrian law. In any case, and as a principle in combating terrorists inside or outside of Syria, international humanitarian and human rights law should be strictly observed. Regarding the armed opposition groups, it is essential that all States with an influence thereon encourage them to end the fighting in order to join the political process. That is crucial to making any progress in the political domain.

Concerning the political process, our ministers expressed satisfaction at the fact that there is increasingly strong international support for the efforts initiated within the Astana process, aimed at solving the Syrian crisis through political means. That is also confirmation of the fact that the Syrian crisis did not and does not have any military solution. We appreciate the efforts of Mr. De Mistura with respect to the establishment of a constitutional committee. At the same time, we would like to stress that measures related to the constitutional committee should be carried out according to the understandings reached between the Astana guarantor States and the Special Envoy. The proposal that was submitted in that regard should be further examined and adjusted. In their upcoming

consultations in Geneva, the representatives of the Astana guarantor States will discuss that issue with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General.

We underline the importance of making progress in launching the constitutional committee. Nevertheless, exerting political pressure to set artificial deadlines, deviating from the understandings reached or any other political manoeuvring is not acceptable and would prove to be counterproductive. No success can be achieved and no progress can be made through making hasty decisions, ignoring the realities on the ground or making political miscalculations. Ultimately, the right to determine the future of Syria belongs exclusively to Syrians. We should therefore only facilitate a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process.

One of the key factors that can contribute to national dialogue and accelerate the reconciliation process is the return of all refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), and every effort should therefore be made to facilitate their voluntary return. Unfortunately, there have been attempts to deliberately discourage refugees and IDPs from returning to their homes. That is an irresponsible approach. They should not be forced to stay where they are or prevented from repatriating.

Equally important is the reconstruction of Syria. This is critical to facilitating the return of refugees and IDPs and to launching a significant political process. While the Syrian Government has already started the reconstruction process, the international community needs to contribute to the country in order to enable it to rebuild all of its infrastructure. That should not be politicized, delayed or made conditional. Just as the Islamic Republic of Iran supported Syria in defeating terrorists, it will also play a constructive role in bringing peace and prosperity to the country.

Finally, with regard to the allegations made by the United States, I must stress that they only reflect the failure of that country's policies in Syria. Rather than making such claims, the United States must end its occupation of Syrian territory and stop supporting terrorist groups.

I always hesitate to respond to our colleagues from Saudi Arabia, but, unfortunately, they misuse every meeting here in the Security Council and in the General Assembly as an opportunity to go against Iran and encourage a few small States of the region to follow them. That is very sad for our region. That country has played a very destructive role. Everyone around this table knows about Saudi Arabia's destructive role in the region, which recent events have demonstrated. It should cease its fabrications and disinformation. Terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq were nurtured by Saudi ideologies, funded by its petrodollars and armed with its weapons. Saudi Arabia should stop talking about Syria or Iran's legitimate presence in the country, which is only to fight the terrorists backed by the United States and Saudi Arabia.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): I would like to thank Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura for his comprehensive briefing. He identified the main challenges that lie ahead on the political track. As his mission comes to an end, I would like also to express our deep appreciation to him for his tireless efforts in finding a political solution to the Syrian crisis. Before sharing our views on the way forward, I would like to provide an update on the implementation of the Idlib memorandum. The memorandum signed one month ago at the Sochi Turkish-Russian summit a month ago stabilized the situation in Idlib province. Thanks to the memorandum, it was possible to preserve the de-escalation status of Idlib.

Since my most recent statement to the Council on the situation in Syria (see S/PV.8355), considerable progress has been made in the implementation of the memorandum on the following points: the cessation of hostilities has been established; the borders of the demilitarized zone in Idlib have been determined; the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the demilitarized zone has been completed ahead of the 10 October deadline; significant progress has been achieved on the withdrawal of radical groups from the demilitarized zone — we are continuing our efforts to that end — and we are working on the modalities of coordinated patrols together with Russia as well as on other measures aimed at strengthening the sustainability of the ceasefire regime.

Thanks to the memorandum, further bloodshed and a humanitarian tragedy in Idlib have been averted. Relieved over the improvement of the situation on the ground, tens of thousands of Syrians have started to return to their homes in Idlib. Following months of fear in anticipation of a full-scale assault, the memorandum has given civilians in Idlib respite and raised their hopes for a peaceful solution. The memorandum has

also proven that the situation in Idlib can be addressed through effective diplomacy.

The de-escalation status of Idlib remains crucial to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe, to pave the way for the advancement of the political process, and to create the necessary conditions to fight terrorism effectively and in line with international humanitarian law. Our priority now is to seize on this momentum to advance the political process. With that understanding, we strongly and actively support Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's efforts to establish the constitutional committee as soon as possible. We are working closely with the other Astana guarantors and Mr. De Mistura towards that end.

The constitutional committee requires a credible, inclusive and balanced structure. That is essential to its legitimacy. The committee will be the key to achieving the ultimate goal of finding a negotiated political solution in Syria, in line with resolution 2254 (2015). Its work will pave the way for holding free and fair elections under United Nations supervision, with the participation of all Syrians, including those who are living outside the country. Any attempt to design a political system for Syria without Syrian ownership would lack legitimacy and be detrimental. The political process must be owned and led by the Syrians themselves, and not by others deciding on their behalf.

We reiterate our call on the Council and the overall international community to support our endeavours and expedite the political process. In order to give fresh impetus to the efforts to put an end to the conflict, Turkey has introduced the idea of hosting a quadrilateral summit with the participation of France, Germany and Russia. Our main objective is to contribute to efforts to find a convergence of ideas to reach a sustainable political solution. Talks among the four countries to set the date and agenda of the summit are under way. We believe that this initiative will be helpful in supporting the efforts to reach a political settlement.

The conflict in Syria is in its eighth year, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives lost and millions forcibly displaced both within and beyond Syria's borders. There is an urgent need for concerted efforts to end this colossal human tragedy, meet the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and pave the way for lasting peace. Turkey will continue its efforts to achieve a viable political solution in Syria, a solution that is owned and led by Syrians and based on a lasting ceasefire on the ground that allows for a meaningful political process. It is high time that the Security Council puts its weight behind efforts to that end.

Lastly, I do not consider the regime's representative my legitimate counterpart. I will therefore not dignify his delusional accusations with a response.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Schulz (Germany): I would like to thank the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria for his comprehensive briefing. It is certainly much too early to bid him farewell, but let me take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude for his tireless peace efforts over all these years. It is with great regret that we note the fact that his mission will soon come to an end.

Like Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Germany is taking the floor as a member of the Small Group on Syria. I will make three brief points on the situation in Idlib, the political process and refugees.

To start with Idlib, we welcome the fact that the Idlib agreement reached by Turkey and Russia has so far prevented a full-scale military offensive by the Syrian regime that could have triggered an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe. At the same time, we call on Russia and Iran, as Astana guarantors alongside Turkey, to ensure that the ceasefire continues to be fully respected by all parties, including the Syrian regime. We expect them to follow through with their commitment and guarantee the protection of civilians and infrastructure, as well as safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access.

On the political process, as Secretary-General Guterres emphasized, with the Idlib agreement now in place the international community must seize the opportunity to move forward with the United Nations-led political process. Otherwise, the military de-escalation will not be sustainable. We need to urgently seize the chance to make progress in the United Nations-led political process. Now is the time to start working towards an inclusive, credible and sustainable political solution in Syria, in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015).

Germany therefore fully supports the Special Envoy's efforts and his clear mandate to convene a constitutional committee as quickly as possible, as the members of the small group called for in their statement of 27 September. The Special Envoy's clear mandate to

form a credible and inclusive constitutional committee must be respected. In that regard, Russia and the Syrian regime must live up to their Sochi commitments. That includes respecting the fact that it is solely the Special Envoy's prerogative to select the independent members of the committee. We urge all parties to refrain from any attempts to manipulate or undermine that process. Doing so would endanger its credibility and legitimacy and therefore any prospect of achieving a political solution consistent with resolution 2254 (2015). We are looking forward to Staffan de Mistura's next report on the progress achieved in the Security Council.

Finally, I want to say a word on refugees and reconstruction. We repeatedly hear suggestions these days from Russia, Iran and the Syrian regime that it is time for the return of refugees and for reconstruction. Let me say first that Germany has made very significant contributions to alleviating the suffering of the Syrian people by contributing to the financing of humanitarian assistance, and we will continue to do so.

With respect to returns, Germany, too, certainly supports the return of Syrian refugees to their homes, but only if and once the conditions are ripe. More than stones, cement and bulldozers, Syrian refugees need safety guarantees and political change in Syria so that they can begin to see a future for themselves in the country they had to flee. Returns must be voluntary, safe and dignified, in accordance with international standards. As the key institution for dealing with refugees, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) must not be bypassed. It stands ready to facilitate large-scale returns once the many obstacles have been removed and the necessary guarantees are in place. We fully agree with UNHCR that the biggest immediate obstacle for a large-scale return is the lack of safety in Syria. Returnees need more than protection from armed conflict; they need to be safe from political persecution, arbitrary arrests or expropriation.

Certainly, Syria needs economic and social rebuilding, but as we and the European Union have stressed many times, we will have a meaningful discussion on reconstruction only if we see clear, irrevocable progress in the political process. We will not invest in war and corruption. We will not build on shifting sands. What we need is a political transition that paves the way for viable economic and social reconstruction.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, who has asked to make an additional statement.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syria) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for requesting the floor once again, but I will be brief.

In my statement, I pointed out the political flaws of the small group on Syria and its construction. However, I would like now to draw attention to its moral flaw, namely, the presence therein of the Saudi regime, which is underdeveloped in terms of civilization and mentality. In that regard, I would like to shed light on some points that were raised in the statement of the Saudi Ambassador.

First, in his statement he called for drafting a new constitution for my country. There is an Arab saying that if you are riddled with flaws, you must hide them. Members know that Saudi Arabia has no constitution and no Parliament. The country does not even have a name. Instead, its name belongs to the ruling family. Thus when someone says "the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", it is as if that person were saying "the Republic of Macron" for France, or "the Kingdom of Theresa May" for Britain, or the "United States of Trump". That is the case now. That country has no name.

Secondly, a regime that kidnaps and holds the Prime Minister of another State and imprisons its own princes and businessmen until they pay ransom is unworthy of respect. It is a regime that is concealing one of its opponents, who was basically a member of Saudi intelligence and worked in Washington, D.C., for many years, and was a right-hand man of the current Saudi Minister for Foreign Affairs. It is a regime that kidnaps a Saudi opponent, Mr. Khashoggi — although I am sure those present have not heard his name before — and holds him in his country's consulate in Istanbul. No one knows what has become of him. That is a regime that cannot speak of law and the pain of others because it is surrounded by the stench of such actions.

Thirdly, the Saudi Ambassador spoke of the desire of his country's regime to help the Syrian people, ignoring the fact that the Saudi regime is primarily responsible for spreading takfiri and Wahhabi terrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Nigeria and South-East Asia.

Fourthly, a regime that sheds blood in Yemen, creates alliances with Israel to bury the Palestinian question and pays generously to buy the conscience of

those who defend it is not worthy of being allowed to speak in the Council about humanitarian and political issues pertaining to other countries. The list goes on, but I will stop at this point.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia, who has asked to make an additional statement.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): When truth appears, liars flee. I did not want to take more of the Council's precious time to respond to the nonsense of my colleague the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, first, because I personally sympathize with him and secondly, because I sympathize with our brother people of Syria, who are suffering at the hands of their leaders and politicians. However, the Syrian regime and those who represent it are the last people who should speak of morality and accusations the way Syria's representative did. He brings up the disappearance of one journalist but seems to ignore the thousands of journalists who have vanished into Syrian prisons, or the people who have been forcibly disappeared and killed, who number not just in the thousands but in the tens of thousands.

He speaks of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as being responsible for the problems of the entire world. The only thing he has not yet blamed it for is the tsunami that recently hit Indonesia. We know quite well that his regime is the one that opened the doors to enable terrorism in Syria to threaten the entire region. That regime has no moral right to speak as it just has, because its record is riddled with flaws, both hidden and visible, as we have seen everywhere and in every forum.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I want to take the floor again to make the following point. It is good that under rule 37 we can hear from Members of the United Nations that are not currently serving on the Security Council. But I really do think that delegations that speak under rule 37 should speak to the agenda item at hand. The agenda item today has been Syria. The situation in Syria is dire enough. I do not think it right that some representatives on this side who spoke under rule 37 used it to pursue personal and national agendas against other Members of the United Nations.

The situation is bad enough in Syria that it deserves our whole attention. We ought to be working as a Council, supported by the wider membership, to support the Secretary-General and his Special Envoy. We do not need lectures from two countries that have done more than anyone else to contribute to the dire situation inside Syria. I therefore hope that when Member States ask to speak under rule 37 in future — and we want to invite them to do so for all the reasons of transparency and openness that we all subscribe to — they will stick to the agenda at hand.

Mr. Cohen (United States of America): I would like to fully associate myself with the statement that the representative of the United Kingdom just made and to add that, in particular, coming from a regime whose behaviour and use of chemical weapons has driven millions of its own citizens to flee as refugees, that statement was outrageous, whether made here in the Council or indeed anywhere.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I did not plan to take the floor either, but my colleagues have left me with no choice. Yes, of course rule 37 is an important one, and we are obliged to keep to the designated agenda item for the meeting that we are discussing, but insisting that the representative of a country that is directly affected by the agenda item we discussing today does not have the right to give his view of the situation, and of its genesis and current and future state as his country sees it, shows a lack of respect for that country's legitimate representative. I want to point that out to the Council once again. And yet it is no secret. We know perfectly well that the countries that have just made statements lack any respect for the legitimate representatives of the Syrian Government — more than that, their attitude to them is totally disrespectful.

Let us grant the countries that we invite here under rule 37 the right to say what they consider to be essential on the agenda item that we are discussing today. Incidentally, I saw no deviation from the issues we are discussing today in the statements by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic. Perhaps the countries that just took the floor did not like something he said, but this is one of those cases where responding with "the truth hurts" is the adage that applies.

I would suggest to the countries that spoke with such impassioned support for abiding by the rules of procedure and our meeting's agenda that they listen very carefully to the words that we heard today not only from the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic but from many other delegations. They show that our versions of what has happened, what is happening and what may happen in Syria are divergent, to put it mildly. In our

statement we called on countries, including those that have opposed us today, to put aside their differences and work together so that we can, finally, arrive at a political settlement in Syria, which is what we all so desperately want.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now make a short statement — I am sure it will be the last — on the way in which Bolivia is presiding over the Security Council.

We agree that States must keep their remarks within the framework of the agenda for which a meeting is convened. Unfortunately, in many cases, that is not happening, and I could cite several examples. When we talk about the question of Palestine, some States talk about other matters. However, for this presidency, all Member States are on the same footing. This presidency will never cut off any State while it is speaking because we believe that the State knows what it is talking about and has every right to express itself with the utmost freedom in the Security Council. As long as we are presiding over the Security Council, therefore, that is how we will conduct ourselves.

The meeting rose at 12:30 p.m.